



**EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS  
HONOLULU**

**LINDA LINGLE  
GOVERNOR**

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## **EDUCATION SUMMIT SPEECH**

**March 27, 2004**

**Aloha and good morning to:**

**Lt. Governor Duke Aiona and Vivian Aiona,**

**Superintendent of Schools Pat Hamamoto,**

**Tony Wagner from the Harvard Graduate School of Education,**

**Members of the Board of Education,**

**Laura Thielen and members of the CARE (Citizens Achieving Reform in Education) Committee,**

**And all legislators, principals, teachers, parents, students and community members.**

**There is no more critical issue in our state than education, and I applaud everyone for coming together today for a common purpose—to help our students succeed.**

**Never during my 20 years in elected office have I seen such widespread and sustained interest in any one topic. This is very encouraging as we grapple with a problem others have discussed off and on for at least the past three decades.**

**I'm not an education expert, and frankly I don't want to make education decisions for our state. But I am experienced at successfully managing organizations, and putting people on a path where they can succeed.**

**In addition, I care very deeply about the kind of future our children will have.**

**As Governor and previously as Mayor of Maui for eight years, and even as Chairman of the Hawai'i Republican Party, I have helped organizations move up to the next level of proficiency.**

**We all have admitted quite publicly that changes must be made to our education system.**

**You are going to hear a lot of exciting ideas today. Ideas like creating schools within schools, developing community partnerships, and encouraging greater involvement by parents.**

**These are all worthy goals, and I wish you well in achieving them.**

**But as we all know, to successfully bring about these or other more systemic changes, we must involve many people in the transformation, especially those responsible for implementing it. We must define what success should be, adopt an action plan, effectively implement it, and then measure the results.**

**As we all know, the current system isn't working well at the school and classroom level.**

**I feel it's my obligation as Governor to act as a catalyst for change so that our schools will receive more money, more authority and more responsibility.**

**This is why I am proposing that we allocate at least 90 percent of the operating budget to principals, and let them work with their school community to determine how best to spend it.**

**The Hawai'i Business Roundtable and a number of other groups have recently joined me in this position. Providing principals and their schools with control over both the school budget and the support services budget will empower the people who best know the needs of their unique mix of students. Schools will finally be able to set the priorities in the order that is best for their community.**

**If that change happens this legislative session, then my administration can turn its full attention to creating a more vibrant economy that generates the revenue needed so that we are able to raise the pay of our teachers. They certainly deserve it.**

**Everyone here wants the same thing—we want Hawai`i's children to receive a quality education.**

**But sadly, the Nation's Report Card ranks us near the bottom of all the states. Despite everyone's best efforts, something has gone very wrong.**

**Teachers should not have to use their own money to buy classroom supplies.**

**Children should not have to learn at schools in various states of disrepair or in classrooms without adequate textbooks.**

**And our schools should not rank at the bottom of the nation!**

**It is especially painful for me to consider how the school system is negatively impacting our host culture. Native Hawaiian children are being left behind in the greatest numbers.**

**O`ahu's two daily papers reported last week that some believe our test scores are low because many students face disadvantages such as language barriers or poverty.**

**Children from poor families and those who use English as a second language present special challenges, but they are no different than the challenges faced in most other states and faced by our own state throughout our history.**

**To blame the system's failure on these or any other children is misguided and unjustified.**

**By the way, my own grandparents came to America as poor immigrants from Russia and Poland who could not speak English. This is not a unique story; it is the American story. And it should never be used as an excuse for a failing system.**

**The bottom line is—our schools have been under-achieving for a very long time.**

**Systemic changes must be made.**

**The status quo is not acceptable.**

**This is especially true now as our world continues its evolution to a true knowledge-based, global economy. The future of our children, our economy and our entire state depends on having good schools.**

**I commend Pat Hamamoto for publicly describing her frustration with the system—as a teacher, a principal and now as superintendent. She is looking for ways to fix the system, which she describes as “obsolete.”**

**There is no lack of ideas.**

**The majority party in the legislature has a proposal.**

**Principals, teachers, students and the general public want to help.**

**And my administration has created a comprehensive education reform package detailing what a new system would look like and how it would be implemented.**

**I had hoped that our plan would have been used as the basis for ongoing discussions—not the abbreviated proposal by the majority party. Our plan is comprehensive, inclusive and I believe the kind of approach that will yield positive results.**

**There are many ideas to consider. Some are distinctly different, but there are areas of common ground.**

**We agree, for example, that more local control is needed.**

**There is great support for allocating funds through a weighted student formula. And, there is enormous support to allow much more decision-making by school principals.**

**Our plan mandates that principals control at least 90 percent of operating funds at their schools. This approach has worked elsewhere and it will work here.**

**Throughout my political career, I've believed in the concept of home rule. Some call it local control. Whichever phrase you use, the concept is the same—the best decisions are those made closest to those who will be impacted by the decisions.**

**Some people believe it's too difficult to switch from a statewide governing process to a local one. I would be the first to admit that it will be a challenge, but I know we're up to the task.**

**When I'm asked to speak at schools, both public and private, I'm usually asked to share life lessons with the students. Among the standard life lessons I share is that the truly meaningful things in life are often those most difficult to achieve.**

**It is no different for us now. We must not be deterred from something so important and meaningful as real education reform simply because the change will be difficult.**

**I am not alone in believing that home rule is an important part of improving our schools.**

**We recently commissioned a statewide poll that found 74 percent of those surveyed want to vote on the issue of local school boards. We've brought copies of the poll to help with your discussions today.**

**The survey also found that 75 percent believe schools should control 90 cents out of every dollar spent on education.**

**And 80 percent believe principals should be held accountable for the progress of their students.**

**These poll results convey a compelling and unmistakable message...our residents care very deeply about education reform. They favor local control. And they want spending authority and accountability at the school level.**

**That's why I believe we should put the various education reform plans on the November ballot and let the people decide.**

**I trust the people and I know they will make the right choice.**

**We have come close to voting on local school boards previously, but the issue never quite made it onto the ballot.**

**Let's make this the year we give the people a choice and give the people a voice.**

**The Maui Chamber of Commerce, the Kuliou`ou/Kalani Iki and Hawai'i Kai Neighborhood Boards, and the IMUA Kamehameha Alumni organization, to name a few, all believe this issue should go on the ballot.**

**If it turns out that the voters don't want local school boards and they don't want principals to control 90 percent of the budget, I will support whatever reform plan they choose.**

**But for the legislature to not even let our people vote on this issue, when clearly the public wants to, shows an alarming lack of respect and trust.**

**An important lesson we learned in school is to open our minds to new possibilities and ways of thinking.**



**Superintendent Hamamoto has stated we should consider “not who is right, but what is right.” And what is right is to follow the public’s will and let the people decide what kind of education reform we will have.**

**Up until now, we have left education decisions up to the politicians and education experts. The results speak for themselves. It is long past the time to let the people weigh in on this issue.**

**I began my remarks by saying how encouraged I am to see so much attention focused on education. Let’s take advantage of this historic opportunity and dramatically improve our educational system. Let this be the year we quit tinkering and start transforming.**

**Let’s put aside our differences and work as a team for the sake of our children and the future of the state.**

**I wish you the best in your workshops today. Aloha.**